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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 001059

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR ADAM STERLING

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM PINRHU

SUBJECT: ORBAN ON ORBAN: FIDESZ PRESIDENT ON THE
OPPOSITION'S LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY

REF: A) BUDAPEST 823 B) BUDAPEST 1043 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E Counselor Eric V. Gaudiosi: Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Meeting with Ambassador Foley June 27 to discuss energy security and the transatlantic relationship (septel), FIDESZ president Viktor Orban also reviewed his plans to "professionalize" the party leadership and his strategy for the months - and years - ahead.

BUDAPEST UNDERGROUND

¶2. (C) A relaxed and often puckish Orban took "the historical perspective" in reviewing FIDESZ's progress from "underground youth movement" in the 80s to governing party in the 90s. He admitted that FIDESZ had been "a better government than a party," and believes that they have only recently established a solid national foundation. He contrasted FIDESZ's momentum with the MSZP's machine, which traditionally "runs good campaigns" but has not modernized in recent years. Nor can they do so now, he maintained, since "you can't build support when everyone hates your policies."

"STRONG ENOUGH TO DELEGATE"?

¶3. (C) Looking back on the FIDESZ party elections (ref a), Orban outlined the division of responsibility within the party leadership and emphasized that he is "strong enough to delegate":

Mihalj Varga: An MP from Karcag and former Minister of Economy, Varga has been designated as the party's senior VP and Orban's deputy. The highest vote-getter among the candidates, Varga is a moderate but seen as closer to Orban than the other VPs. Orban commented that Varga will have "all rights when I'm not available," quipping that "I'm not old but you never know what will happen."

Lajos Kosa: Orban described the popular mayor of Debrecen (and potential party rival) as "a free spirit ... but an entertaining one." As "President of the Independent Republic of Debrecen," Orban joked, Kosa has become indispensable. Although he has asked Kosa to organize FIDESZ efforts to bring local initiatives to national attention, he still considers him "the enfant terrible of the party."

Ildiko Pelczne Gal: Also the president of the FIDESZ women's organization, Gal is in charge of the party's "most energetic activists." Orban noted, however, that the former professor of economics tends to "focus on problems - not on the people affected by problems." He made clear his preference for "targeting the heart, not the head."

Zoltan Pokorni: Orban glossed over reported friction with Pokorni (who often beats him in popularity polls), emphasizing his desire to focus on his "enormous

responsibilities" as Mayor of Budapest's District XII and noting that he is "in negotiation with him now" to lead FIDESZ's preparations for the spring referendum (ref c). A former teacher and not "a street fighter like me," Orban believes Pokorni will be "perfect for the job" of building support in civil society.

REFERENDUM: MORE THAN JUST QUESTIONS

¶4. (C) Focusing on the referendum (ref b), Orban commented that it will be "about more than just the questions on the ballot." FIDESZ will portray the referendum as a national vote of confidence in PM Gyurcsany and as an opportunity to respond to the "government campaign against society." Orban hopes to collect over 2 million signatures - ten times the required number to authorize the referendum and 25% of Hungary's electorate. The signature drive, he continued, will also help update the party's databases, further "mobilizing" for the elections of 2010.

¶5. (C) Discussing demographics, Orban remarked half-jokingly - but only half-jokingly - that "after 2014 we can't lose." It is a "secret fact" of Hungarian politics, he continued, that age is the overwhelming determinant in Hungarian voting patterns. "FIDESZ has a huge advantage among the under-25 bloc," while the MSZP's base is "over-55." The Gyurcsany government, he believes, has managed to outrage both groups by proposing fees on tuition and on health care. The challenge for FIDESZ, he concluded, is "not to rest on our laurels" and to focus on "winning in 2010" rather than "waiting for 2014."

GOVERNMENT-IN-WAITING ... AND WAITING

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¶6. (C) Toward that end, FIDESZ is making clear that it is preparing to govern. Responding to our question re the possibility of a shadow cabinet, Orban replied that it is "obvious who's who" in the party. He detailed FIDESZ's "cabinet-in-waiting" as consisting of Parliamentary Faction Leader Tibor Navracsics as Cabinet Minister "no matter who the Prime Minister is," MP Laszlo Kover as Director of the Intelligence Services, former FM Janos Martonyi and Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Zsolt Nemeth as "in charge of foreign policy," and MP Miklos Matolcsi as Minister of Economy. He also welcomed Zsigmond Jarai's departure from the National Bank, commenting that he will now be able to help FIDESZ restore its ties to the U.S. (septel).

Orban expressed concern, however, that any formal declaration of a shadow cabinet - unprecedented in modern Hungarian history - would focus "too much attention on our programs rather than the government's."

¶7. (C) Comment: Orban is clearly thriving on the activity surrounding the referendum. From his opening remark in the Ambassador's office (pointing out the Soviet War Memorial visible from the window and suggesting that "we call in some Estonian know-how") to his parting comment (spreading his arms at the door to the embassy's secure area and noting "no cell phone, no boss: I'm a free man"), he was both engaged in the details and aware of the big picture. Although he put the best possible face on divergences of opinion within the party, he has allowed other voices to emerge over the course of the past year. He is aware of the need for FIDESZ to become less of a resistance movement and more of a modern, western party organized along more corporate lines. He is also conscious of the need to repair his relationship with the U.S. Though it may be a twelve-step program, he has at least taken the first step by recognizing the problem. End Comment.

FOLEY